

Thousands Of Returning Soldiers Face A New Enemy

by NPR STAFF



Courtesy Colby Buzzell

Colby Buzzell was diagnosed with PTSD after returning home.

September 4, 2010

text size **A** **A** **A**

More than seven years after U.S. troops first invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003, President Obama addressed the nation on Tuesday to commemorate the official end of the Iraq War. However, the legacy of one of America's longest combat missions will continue to affect the thousands of troops who came home suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries.

Many soldiers, like Colby Buzzell, were looking for excitement and purpose in the war, but were permanently affected by the combat they saw.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do or be," Buzzell tells NPR's Guy Raz. "Our country was at war, this was my chance to be part of history."

"You think of all the things you're going to do once you go back home," he says. But once he got home, he had trouble coping. He began drinking heavily to avoid reliving firefights and combat missions. Eventually, he became more withdrawn. He and his wife divorced.

Special Series

Traumatic brain injury is considered the "signature injury" of soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. An NPR and ProPublica investigation has uncovered the military's failure to diagnose, treat and document brain injuries. Evidence suggests tens of thousands of soldiers are falling through the cracks.

- Brain Wars: How The Military Is Failing Its Wounded
July 1, 2010

When Buzzell received a letter calling him back into the Army, he says, he would have done anything to avoid going back. He knew he wasn't mentally stable and had been suicidal in the past. Finally seeking help, he was diagnosed with PTSD and deemed "undeployable" by the U.S. Army.

Though thousands of soldiers are diagnosed with PTSD, many more suffer without treatment. Among those who do seek treatment, doctors are finding another, distinctly different problem called traumatic brain injury, or TBI.

The two conditions have similar symptoms, but the causes are quite different. While PTSD is a psychological disorder that can be treated with medication and therapy, TBI is physical injury to the brain that requires cognitive treatment to help rebuild function.

"Fundamentally, PTSD is a disorder where you remember too much, whereas TBI is a disorder where you don't remember enough," says Dr. Gregory O'Shanick, National Medical Director for the Brain Injury Association of America.

"The main differences are that individuals with traumatic brain injuries also will have neurologic symptoms such as headache, light sensitivity, dizziness and will have difficulty, many times, with balance," O'Shanick says.

Individuals with PTSD, on the other hand, will re-experience events or have emotional or behavioral symptoms, like "feeling ashamed, feeling guilty, avoidance types of behavior, things of that nature," O'Shanick says.

Fortunately, doctors are working to develop a better understanding of how to treat the two different disorders and more soldiers are seeking and receiving treatment.

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Recent First



American Capitalist (Jenrale) wrote:

General Sherman said it a long time ago: War is Hell. Not heroic, not glamorous. It's a horrible thing that should only be done as an extreme last resort. When are we, as civilized humans, gonna learn?

Tuesday, September 07, 2010 2:17:50 PM

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thomas patrick huston (TPH) wrote:

I made a documentary detailing the effects of PTSD on Veterans from four different wars, including the war in Iraq.

<http://thomaspatrickhuston.thefactory.me/>

<http://www.viddler.com/explore/tphuston/videos/2/>

Monday, September 06, 2010 11:27:41 AM

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Bob Pomeroy (buenperico) wrote:

It would seem that addressing this situation properly would provide an excellent place to introduce fuel for an economy.

Monday, September 06, 2010 5:04:05 AM

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Anthony Sanudo (sanud002) wrote:

Im glad to see the military stepping up it's response on this issue as PTSD is a horrible affliction. One of the newest breakthroughs in treatment that the military has been using has been getting great results as of late. They call it Virtual Therapy. The create a virtual version of the traumatic situation and with a therapist's assistance they are able to re-live the event in hopes to make new, non traumatic memories of the event. I'll post a link to a great video on the new technique.

<http://www.ndep.us/Virtual-Therapy>

Monday, September 06, 2010 2:34:34 AM

[Recommend \(2\)](#) ↑[Report abuse](#)**floyd elterman (vergne)** wrote:

President George W Bush will go down in history as the only President of the USA to start two wars during his administration, let alone in the wrong countries and for the wrong reasons.

Monday, September 06, 2010 1:28:44 AM

[Recommend \(10\)](#) ↑[Report abuse](#)**Wayne Leng (Renegade98)** wrote:

As if that isn't bad enough, now information comes out that those who suffer with PTSD are far more likely to end up with dementia. Wow, that is really something to look forward to.

Sunday, September 05, 2010 11:04:31 PM

[Recommend \(1\)](#) ↑[Report abuse](#)**Dr. Tramp (zwerfer)** wrote:

A few words of advise from a Vietnam vet to the new vets. Get and save copies of everything pertaining to your time in service. Everything!

Don't trust the VA to volunteer any info or help. Talk to the DAV, American Legion or another veteran's organization about what benefits you qualify for and how to apply for them.

If you submit a claim don't just sit back and wait for the VA to get around to you. Be polite but bug them until you get a result.

Don't give up. It's not unusual to be denied the first time you file a claim. Appeal it as soon as possible.

Welcome home. I'm glad you made it back. Good luck.

Sunday, September 05, 2010 10:34:02 PM

[Recommend \(17\)](#) ↑[Report abuse](#)**Some Guy (You know)** wrote:

"sayf Hadd (SayfHadd)"'s comment is deeply offensive. These men and women did their duty, what the government and by implication society told them to do. They are now our society's responsibility to take care of. It is irrelevant whether you "feel sorry" for them or not.

Sunday, September 05, 2010 10:31:12 PM

[Recommend \(2\)](#) ↑[Report abuse](#)**Brian Tingstad (tinger)** wrote:

Larry, where did you get facts from?

Sunday, September 05, 2010 7:25:05 PM

[Recommend \(6\)](#) ↑[Report abuse](#)**A. Junkin (CapKirk)** wrote:

sayf Hadd - If you do not like the freedoms of the USA, please go back where you feel loved.

Sunday, September 05, 2010 6:18:41 PM

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